United Nations

Press Release

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

- Security Council unanimously extends mandate of Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group for one month, until 28 February. Meeting on Persian Gulf conflict to be scheduled.

- Secretary-General is informed by United States Ambassador that Washington-based press criticisms of efforts by his Personal Representative on El Salvador talks do not reflect United States position.

- International Maritime Organization (IMO) to help clean up oil spill in Persian Gulf pollution emergency.

- Human Rights Commission hears statements by EEC Council President and representatives on human rights in occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, and right of peoples to self-determination.

- Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women concludes session in Vienna; recommends that women working in family enterprises be paid.

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The Security Council has extended the mandate of the United Nations Military Observer Group on the Iran-Iraq border -- known as UNIIMOG -- for one more month, until the end of February.

The Council acted unanimously last night in adopting resolution 685 (1991), by which it also requested the Secretary-General to report back this month on his further consultations with Iran and Iraq concerning the Group's future.

The Secretary-General had earlier reported to the Council that both Iran and Iraq have given firm indications to the Group that they remained determined to implement fully, in due course, the agreed arrangements.

The Secretary-General noted that the fact that the parties had not proceeded according to schedule was "clearly not due to lack of commitment on

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either side", but was a consequence of the outbreak of hostilities in the area. He said Iran and Iraq had confirmed that they would continue to count on the presence and assistance of UNIIMOG, which was set up in 1987 to verify, confirm and supervise the cease-fire and the withdrawal of all forces to the internationally recognized borders. Because of the current crisis in the region, the United Nations observers are operating only from the Iranian side of the border.

During last night's Council meeting, the representatives of Cuba and Yemen expressed regret that the Council had not yet been able to meet to consider the current wider war situation in the region.

Both Council members have requested an immediate open meeting, along with Jordan, the Sudan and the five North African countries of the Union of Arab Maghreb.

The Ambassador of Cuba, Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, said the Council had an elementary obligation to fulfil in connection with the situation in the Gulf -- which was a serious problem to the entire world.

The Ambassador of Yemen, Abdalla Saleh Al-Ashtal, said the crisis in the Gulf might lead to a paralysis of the Council. The Council must always stand against war. What was happening in the region was going beyond what the Council had authorized. He said there was an attempt to destroy the military and scientific infrastructure of Iraq rather than to liberate Kuwait.

The Security Council President, Bagbeni Adeito Nzengeya of Zaire, said the Council had agreed to hold an open meeting to discuss the present situation in the Persian Gulf region, but had not yet decided on a date. He said the Council President for the month of February, Simbarashe Simbanenduku Mumbengegwi (Zimbabwe), would continue consultations to try to prepare for the meeting.

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A United Nations official said today that the Secretary-General was disturbed by a press dispatch from Washington reporting criticisms of the efforts in the El Salvador talks by his Personal Representative, Alvaro de Soto.

The official said United States Ambassador, Thomas R. Pickering, had telephoned the Secretary-General this morning and assured him that the anonymous sources did not reflect the United States position regarding ongoing efforts under the Secretary-General's auspices, which the United States supports.

While obviously the United Nations plays an important role in this effort, the responsibility for progress in the negotiations belongs to the parties, who set the pace and must agree on the substance, the official said. He added that Mr. de Soto performs his role in constant consultation with them.

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In another development, the Secretary-General was asked this morning by correspondents about his reaction to a statement made earlier today by South African President De Klerk which emphasized the Government's determination to fulfil its promises of reforms towards the abolition of apartheid.

The Secretary-General in reply said he hoped the developments were fully confirmed and that it meant that the beginning of the end of apartheid was near. Mr. Perez de Cuellar said he considered the statement "a very constructive step towards the eradication of the system of apartheid".

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The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the London-based agency of the United Nations responsible for maritime safety and the prevention of pollution from ships, is to help the Saudi Arabian authorities to clean up the oil spill now threatening large areas of the Persian Gulf.

Among measures developed by IMO to combat pollution is the International Convention on Oil Preparedness, Response and Co-operation, which is designed to facilitate international co-operation in the event of a major pollution threat.

In that context, a number of IMO member States have made offers of assistance to the agency. The Secretary-General of IMO, William A. O'Neil, has established an operations centre within the organization to handle this task, and contacts have been established with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States as well as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

In a statement today, Mr. O'Neil said, that during the last 10 years, the measures that have been adopted by IMO and its 134 member States have led to a remarkable reduction in the amount of oil pollution generated by shipping activities. Nevertheless, the new Convention was an attempt to do more in improving the international system for responding to major marine pollution disasters. Mr. O'Neil added that none of the 90 countries participating in the Conference had realized just how quickly co-operation of this type would be needed and that it would be required in this context.

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The Human Rights Commission, today ending the first week of its forty-seventh session in Geneva, has taken up the question of violations of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine. The Commission is also discussing the right of peoples to self-determination and its application to peoples under colonial or alien domination or foreign occupation.

Addressing the Commission yesterday, Jacques Poos, Deputy Prime Minister of Luxembourg and current President of the Council of the European Communities, reiterated the European Community's condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and of recent acts of repression in the Baltics.

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Referring to the Baltics, Mr. Poos called attention to the tragic events about two weeks ago in the city of Vilnius and a week later in Riga. He said the Community and its member States had condemned those acts of repression, which were in flagrant violation of the Charter of Paris, formally adopted in November last year at the Summit of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE).

He went on to say that current events were a sad reminder that in the end, any continuous and systematic violation of fundamental rights inevitably led to conflicts which rapidly spread beyond the limited context in which they arose. It was therefore essential for the international community to seek to guarantee international peace through its activities in support of respect for human rights.

Among other statements yesterday, the representative of Tunisia, Souad Lyagoubi-Ouahch, said the repression of the Palestinian people continued in the occupied territories. The United Nations had for the past 23 years adopted resolutions confirming the rights of the Palestinian people, but they had had no effect on the Israeli authorities. The intifadah was a legitimate response to the repression, and international efforts were needed to secure a lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

In another statement yesterday, Fawaz Shana, of Jordan, said the Commission had succeeded in drawing the world's attention to the crucial problem of the Palestinians for many years. Yet Israel was still continuing its aggressive stance towards Palestinians and its disregard for the international community's unambiguous criticism of its actions. He called for Israel's adherence to United Nations resolutions.

As the Commission continued the debate on the Palestinian question today, the representative of Israel, Ralph Walden, said that while his country had not made the Fourth Geneva Convention part of its law, it applied the treaty in practice.

Referring to the curfew imposed since the outbreak of the Gulf war, Mr. Walden said that it was not true, as had been alleged, that the reason why the curfew was so strict was to prevent the Palestinian Arabs from acquiring their basic needs, including food. Israel was ensuring distribution of food and medical supplies. The real reason why the curfew was strict was that in the present situation, Israel had to take stringent measures to protect the safety of its citizens. It had to respond to acts of violence, with its soldiers using force only as a last resort.

The Israeli representative went on to say that the right to Palestinian self-determination was recognized in the Camp David Accords. Last year's plan put forward by Israeli Prime Minister Shamir made provision for the implementation of the Accords through negotiation with elected representatives of the Palestinians. If anything was responsible for postponement of negotiation, it was pressure exerted on Israel to negotiate not with elected representatives of the Palestinians, but with their self-appointed representatives, namely the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), he said.

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Affirming that women who worked in family enterprises without payment were being exploited, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women this morning called for such women workers to be guaranteed payment, social security and social benefits.

Concluding its tenth session, which began on 21 January in Vienna, the Committee also called for an evaluation of the domestic work of women and recommended that that value be added to the gross national product of the country.

In another general recommendation, the Committee called on countries to provide information on disabled women and on measures taken to ensure that they had equal access to education, employment, health services, and social security. There are currently 103 States parties to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The 23-member expert Committee is the international mechanism for monitoring progress in the implementation of the Convention. States parties are required to submit an initial report within one year of accession to the Convention, and periodic reports at least every four years.

In the course of its two-week session, the Committee studied the initial reports of Burkina Faso and Italy and the second periodic reports of Austria, Denmark, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda and Yugoslavia. The Committee questioned the representatives of those countries on the legal and social measures undertaken by them to give effect to the provisions of the Convention.

The Committee decided that, at its 1992 session, it would consider the initial reports of Honduras, Romania and Yemen, and the second periodic reports of El Salvador, Sri Lanka, Spain, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

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